

Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
Public Hearing re: H.B. No. 5037 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE
BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023
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The Governor's Prevention Partnership
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Greetings Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and all Appropriations Committee members. I come before you today to ask for your continued commitment to one of Connecticut's greatest assets – OUR YOUTH!

My name is Wendy Mill, and I am a lifelong Nutmegger, spouse to one, mother of two, and ally to more than 730,000 youth who reside within our borders. My work as a Program Coordinator for The Governor's Prevention Partnership allows me to work with state and local partners and, perhaps more precisely, work alongside our youth to help keep all our young people safe from the threats facing them today – including substance use and rising mental health concerns. These issues erode tomorrow's community leaders' social, emotional, and mental well-being.

Prevention begins with youth! Youth advocacy can and MUST play an integral role in our global prevention initiatives. A growing body of research points to the efficacy of youth participation as agents of community change in decreasing rates of alcohol, tobacco, other drug use, and other risky behaviors among youth. In short, youth respond to youth! One of our primary responsibilities as prevention facilitators is to support our young leaders with the knowledge, expertise, resources, and appropriate platforms to carry out this critical work.

The Partnership's Youth Advisory Board is a statewide consortium of young prevention advocates supported by DMHAS and local coalitions. The group regularly convenes throughout the year to support youth actively involved in community prevention work. Youth have an

opportunity to network with like-minded young people, collaborate on overarching prevention initiatives and develop their professional skills through advanced trainings in prevention, leadership, and advocacy. In turn, these young people are better equipped to support local prevention initiatives such as educational campaigns, training regarding youth asset building, mental health, or reducing risky behaviors among their peers.

The *E3: Encourage, Empower, Engage* program is a school-based peer-to-peer initiative on underage drinking and substance abuse that promotes healthy decision-making through a 12-module educational curriculum on character development and leadership opportunities. This data-informed program is led by youth for youth in high school.

Students are supported with the guidance of an adviser. Since 2016, the E3 program has been hosted in 16 schools and has trained over 250 peer leaders statewide. Outcome measurements have demonstrated favorable program impact in reducing participants' risky behaviors following the program.

I thank you for your support of the prevention initiatives provided through The Governor's Prevention Partnership, DMHAS, and our community partners, and ask for your continued funding so that together, we can continue to give rise to our youth voices and build a healthier Connecticut for tomorrow's young people.

